

The Freethinker

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WE are to-day continually being reminded of the "Elizabethan" Age, that is of the age of the first Queen Elizabeth, with the age of whom superficial and misleading comparisons are frequently being made with our own. The ostensible basis for these comparisons are apparently solely the accidental identity in the names. Actually, the *fundamental* character of the life and times of the first Elizabeth differed essentially and profoundly from our own.

Reformation versus Counter-Reformation

The age of the Reformation in which the "Elizabethan" age was comprised had, indeed, one feature in common with our own; it was also an age of revolution, and of counter-revolution in the social sphere. But its terms of reference were quite different; particularly in their relations with religion. The great upheaval which dominated the social life of the 16th century, was not a *political* revolution, as is the case in our day, but a *religious* revolution, Protestantism. In the Reformation this took the place which is held by Communism to-day, and Luther and Calvin were the revolutionary equivalents of Marx and Lenin now. Similarly the place taken by the leaders of any contemporary Fascist counter-revolution in the present century was taken by the Roman Catholic Church and especially by the then newly-founded Jesuit Order, those shock troops of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The age of the first Elizabeth witnessed the head-on clash of these rival creeds, and of their secular political instruments.

The "Company" of Jesus

To read the greatest "Elizabethan" tragedy, *Hamlet*, with its "hero" left out would be an incomplete study of the famous play. Similarly, to record the "Counter-Reformation" of the Church of Rome against the Reformation without mentioning the Jesuits would be equally misleading. For the Spanish "Company of Jesus" represented both the "brains-trust" and the militant "Old Guard" of the Catholic "Counter-Reformation." Founded earlier in the 16th century by Ignatius Loyola to wage "Holy War" against the enemies of Rome, the "Company"—the term is a specifically military one!—soon became a name of terror and mystery in the lands of the Reformation. A famous modern revolutionary has described the Jesuits of the first vintage in these appropriate terms, "The Jesuits," wrote Leon Trotsky, "represented a military organisation, strictly centralised, aggressive and dangerous not only to enemies but also to allies. By his psychology and methods of action the Jesuit of the "heroic" period distinguished himself from an average priest, as the warrior of the church from its shopkeeper." (c.f. L. Trotsky *Their Morals and Ours*.) One may add that such a description is fully confirmed in, and by, the literature of both friend and foe in that era.

The Spanish "Fifth Column"

The current political term "Fifth Column," invented in Twentieth Century Spain, was equally true of Spain in the

16th Century. For the Spanish world-empire was the militant standard-bearer, the secular crusader on behalf of the Catholic "Counter-Reformation." On behalf of this Spain wore herself out with "quixotic" ardour. The England of Elizabeth was engaged in a growing military struggle with Catholic Spain. This culminated in the defeat of the "Spanish Armada" in 1588.

But Spain was still strong enough to defeat an English counter-attack on Portugal in 1589, and to invade Ireland at the very end of Elizabeth's reign. Besides Spain's naval "column," the Armada, she also disposed of an equally dangerous "fifth column," the Jesuits, who landed in England in disguise and sought to undermine her allegiance to Queen

Elizabeth, whom Pope Pius the Fifth had already excommunicated as a heretic and deposed as a "bastard."

A Jesuit Autobiography

Like all wars in which ideas play a considerable part, the religious wars of the 16th century were waged with extreme ferocity on both sides. This fact is vividly indicated in a remarkable Latin autobiography of a Jesuit priest on "The English Mission" between 1588 and 1606, and which was translated into English a few years back. Its author was born in 1564, the same year as was Shakespeare. Fr. John Gerard, S.J., was one of the leaders of the Jesuit "Fifth Column" and has left us a vivid account of the hide-and-seek illegal existence of a Catholic missionary "on the run" with a price on his head, who lived a fugitive existence in the Elizabethan "underground." Once, indeed, Fr. Gerard came above ground with a vengeance. For he was caught by the ubiquitous spies of Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's efficient and ruthless Secretary of State. Fr. Gerard describes his examination by a committee of the Privy Council, which included the great Sir Francis Bacon, and the famous lawyer, Sir Edward Coke. Subsequently, he was horribly tortured, a process of which he gives a lurid and curiously detailed picture. Finally, Fr. Gerard made a daring escape from the Tower, also fully described. Despite repeated hair-breadth escapes, he remained in England until May, 1606, when the furore aroused by the "Gunpowder Plot" forced him to fly the country on the very day—May 3rd—that his Jesuit colleagues were executed for alleged complicity in this famous "plot" to blow up Parliament.

A Foot Longer than God had made him

Fr. Gerard's narrative is as exciting as a detective story, besides giving both reliable political and psychological information. Whatever else he may have been, our author was a very brave man. Queen Elizabeth's "sworn tormentor," who, despite the fact that torture was always illegal at Common Law, habitually practiced his limb-twisting art in the underground dungeons of the Tower, could get nothing out of Gerard, though even the priest's remarkably restrained narrative indicates that his own sufferings must have been horrible in the extreme. Torture, however, was to be

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

An Elizabethan Jesuit

By F. A. RIDLEY

expected by every priest on the "English Mission" for, as it is clear from Gerard's candid narrative, cruelty was neither a Spanish nor a Catholic monopoly! Did not the same torturer who got to work unsuccessfully on John Gerard mangle his Jesuit colleague, the more famous Robert Southwell so horribly, before execution, that (in the torturer's own words) he "made him a foot longer than had God"? It is clear enough from Gerard's own story that the Jesuitical "Fifth Column" in Elizabethan England was no place for cowards!

A Perilous Mission

Fr. Gerard himself categorically denies that he aimed at the overthrow of Queen Elizabeth or her regime. He asserts repeatedly that he is a loyal Englishman, and even once produced, under examination, an order from his superiors in Rome commanding priests on the "English Mission" to steer clear of English politics. However, the English Government judged differently, and probably correctly. At a time when England had her back to the wall, fighting, abroad, the strongest military power in Europe, and the dagger of the assassin at home, a Jesuit who landed in England in the year of the Armada and left it in the year that saw Guy Fawkes—a pupil of the Jesuits—and his fellow conspirators executed, was asking for trouble! Fr. Gerard knew this perfectly well, and spent his first night "on the mission" hiding in a wood in mortal fear that he would be betrayed by the barking of dogs—the whole episode is as graphically described as in a first-rate novel. He had every reason to fear detection and capture. His three Jesuit companions were all caught and executed and very few of the Jesuit "Fifth Column" survived to return to the continent. Most of them ended in the dungeons of the Tower or on the gallows at Tyburn.

"Ends and Means"

Our English Jesuit makes, one must confess, a favourable impression, besides being a master of crisp narrative prose he is consistently modest, objective and obviously sincere to the point of fanaticism. But then, no one but a fanatic would have embarked upon a mission of such desperate danger. It is obvious, even from his restrained narrative that his courage under torture must have been abnormal. That the English government regarded him as one of the most dangerous enemies of the Elizabethan regime is proved by its frequent references to Gerard's underground activities,

but, once out of the Tower, they could never lay their hands on him again. What, one naturally asks, made such a man a traitor to his country and the emissary of a foreign power? The famous history of this period by that stout patriot and Protestant, J. A. Froude, has described Gerard and his kind in terms of harshest condemnation. But, in fairness, that was not at all how these old Jesuits themselves viewed their activities. To Gerard, as to his contemporary, the author of *Hamlet*, "the times were out of joint"—"this last era of a declining and gasping world" as he describes it in his preface. Only what he elsewhere terms "the restoration of wandering souls to their Maker via the One True Church of Rome," could save mankind. As compared with his eternal welfare, what did a man's Queen and country, particularly if heretical, count? Our Jesuit author does not so much state as assume this point of view throughout his autobiography of a mission.

The Jesuits and "Gunpowder Plot"

In the closing pages of his autobiography, Gerard makes some interesting comments on the famous "plot" of the English Catholics in 1605. He knew most of the conspirators personally though he does not mention Guy Fawkes. Gerard professed to disapproval of the "Plot," which he regarded as a council of despair, calculated to recoil on the heads of the Catholic community in England. He also denies that the English Jesuits knew anything about it beforehand, except under the sacrosanct "seal of confession." The English government took a different view and placed a reward on the heads of the three leading Jesuits, Gerard himself, Frs. Garrett and Oldcoppe. Our author, as said, escaped to the Continent on the very day that his colleagues were executed.

A Fascinating Narrative

This fascinating story was written in 1609 by order of his superiors in the Order. Like a good Jesuit, Gerard ascribes his own successes to the Order, which, as he complacently observes "is the most feared of all by the enemies of God." About himself he is remarkably modest. It is not unpleasing to recall that after so many tribulations the old Jesuit survived to a green old age, dying in Rome in 1637, at the then advanced age of 73.

[cf. *John Gerard—The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*.
Translated from the Latin by Philip Caniman. Longmans, 1951.]

FOR NEWCOMERS

Can We Salvage Religion?

THE argument is frequently heard that when all the myths of religion are discarded there still remains a useful function for religion itself as apart from its various forms.

It is only possible to argue in this way by first fixing on some pet definition of religion which, it is hoped, will make it acceptable.

We have to remember that religion has been associated essentially with the supernatural, and science demolishes it. The age of science and that of religion, though they may overlap, hold two distinct chapters in the story of human development. Faced with the same phenomena each has its own interpretation to offer. The man is ill because the devils are in him, taking advantage of some moral lapse. The man is ill because he caught a chill and was not fitted to resist the germs. We have a bad harvest because some individual has offended the Lord. We have a bad harvest because of inclement weather conditions. And so on. Science and theism are rival interpretations of nature. And as the former advances the latter retreats. Show the redundancy of the

religious interpretation and you have abolished the need for religion. For what is there left for religion to do?

Does it aim at satisfying our craving for a picture of existence? Then philosophy can do its work better. Does it promise to gratify the artistic element in man? Then music and painting, poetry and drama, sculpture and architecture, are the proper channels. Does it undertake the formulation of a code of behaviour? Then why bother with ethics and sociology? Are heaven and hell the necessary carrot and spur respectively to our actions in regard to others? Then does maternal love operate on religious bribes? Is it so in the animal kingdom? Does the labour of the scientist who is an atheist so operate? Did Mme. Curie expect such rewards?

Once we have removed the religious interpretation of things there is nothing left for religion to do that cannot be done in some other sphere with more satisfactory results. Now that comparative religion and anthropology have exhibited the mythological character of the revealed religions it is possible to retain the term which has such historical connections and make it signify something quite different.

G. H. TAYLOR.

Which Three Books?

By COLIN McCALL

WHICH three books have been most influential in shaping my present freethought views? Well, I read as much for pleasure as for enlightenment. Though not averse to frolic and fancy in literature, I am specially attracted by the rational and critical writer, have no patience with the abstruse and mystical, and detest the deliberately obscure. Like most bookmen I have had periods when I avidly devoured everything I could lay hands on by a particular author: Anatole France, for instance, Richard Jefferies, or Lytton Strachey. These three writers have, in fact, influenced me strongly but cannot be held responsible for my opinions or my mode of expression. I have used them and many others in reaching a certain attitude towards life.

That attitude, of course, is basically freethinking and, like all freethinkers, I owe much to Bradlaugh, Foote, Robertson and Cohen. It was from these men, and their fellow propagandists, that I learned the first requisite for clear thinking on all subjects—an evolutionary approach. But I was searching for an authoritative work on organic evolution in particular and I found what I wanted in *The Scientific Basis of Evolution* by the late Thomas Hunt Morgan, Professor of Biology at the California Institute of Technology and 1932 Nobel Prize winner for his discoveries concerning the mechanism of heredity. The book gave me precisely what its title promised and is still valuable though more than twenty years old. For clarity and forthrightness it reminds me of Professor John Tyndall's great Belfast Address to the British Association in 1874. There are other parallels too. Dr. Morgan's book also originated in the spoken word, being based upon a series of lectures delivered at Cornell University in 1931. It likewise ends with a resounding challenge to "introspective metaphysics and transcendental philosophy." And it poses the plain alternative that splits human thinking to-day as, indeed, it has since the rise of science: are we to look for natural explanations of phenomena or turn instead to "extraneous causes or mystical somethings" and so forsake the whole basis of human knowledge? I have space to quote only one passage from *The Scientific Basis of Evolution* but I think it gives some idea of the book's worth.

"Modern biology, then, rests its case on the assumption, sometimes amounting to a conviction as the result of wide experience, that the properties of living things are the outcome of their chemical and physical composition and configuration. This is not the same as saying that all the properties of living things can be explained by the known laws of chemistry and physics; for the kinds of reactions that take place in living matter are as much dependent on the kind of system involved as are reactions of non-living matter in different systems."

Man, however, is not merely an animal: he is a social animal; and it is in cultural evolution that we find the key to his rapid progress. While other animals remain dependent upon the slow and rather haphazard process of physical evolution, mankind has developed a cumulative tradition of knowledge whereby each generation is able to start where the last left off: to add to the information it inherits and to pass on the sum total to its successor. Essential to the furthering of this tradition is the attitude that I call "freethinking" but which has been variously termed "liberal," "rational" or "humanist." Whatever we may call it, its importance in human life is undeniable. Man's greatest faculty is that of thinking and his greatest need is to think freely. Hence the value of the struggle for free expression, the struggle—as Karl Popper calls it—for the open society: a struggle that is by no means over yet. It is Dr. Popper's two volumes on *The Open Society and its Enemies* that I turn to next for they

provide, I think, the rational antidote to the two irrational philosophies that have most strongly affected human thought and action in the western world: Platonism and Marxist-Hegelianism. Clearly I can no more than hint at the merit of these volumes here; they need to be read and read seriously. The most important lesson they teach is that there is no purpose behind history. In Dr. Popper's words:

"History itself . . . has no end nor meaning, but we can decide to give it both. We can make it our fight for the open society and against its antagonists . . . and we can interpret it accordingly. Ultimately, we may say the same about the 'meaning of life.' It is up to us to decide what shall be our purpose in life, to determine our ends."

This is a lesson that many have still to learn, not least Professor Arnold Toynbee, whose tomes of carefully-selected facts fitting preconceived theories have proved very popular with those who seek ready-made solutions to their problems.

But I must now move on to my third selection, *The Literary Mind* by Max Eastman. It is a notable book because it deals with a phenomenon of our times: a phenomenon that we need to understand. It considers the position of literature—and particularly of poetry—in an age of scientific knowledge. There was a time when poetry could be used as a medium for expressing human knowledge but this is no longer the case: there can never be another Lucretius. Yet there is still a feeling among literary men that the poets can tell us more about the world than we can learn from the scientists. All kinds of arguments are used to bolster this theory and, not infrequently, a cultivation of obscurity is mistaken for profundity. Men who can spend their time searching for hidden—and sometimes nonexistent—meanings in abstruse writings are sure to find—or invent—something. No doubt it is an exhilarating pursuit but, fortunately for humanity, not all of us have the time or the inclination to indulge in it. There is the business of living to think about, and much to be said for Lord Jeffrey's view that "the ordinary run of sensible, kind people, who fill the world, are after all the best specimens of humanity." Jeffrey's criticisms of literature were founded on common sense. Mr. Eastman's are, too, though he is able to utilise a scientific background that was not available to the editor of *The Edinburgh Review*. He does so splendidly.

Division of labour is here to stay, he insists. It is necessary to human progress and poets, like everybody else, must recognise the fact. It is especially difficult for them to realise that they can no longer be legislators of the world, unacknowledged or otherwise. But they must do so; and so must we. "Poetry," writes Mr. Eastman, "is compelled by its very nature to yield up to science the task of interpreting experience, of finding out what we call truth, of giving men reliable guidance in the conduct of their lives." It is not the poets' speciality, he adds, "to conceive things truly but to live them vividly," whereas it is the function of science "to comprehend and criticize life." That is the way I see it, too.

PURPOSE

"The purpose manifested in evolution, whether in adaptation, specialisation, or biological progress, is only an apparent progress. It is just as much a product of blind forces as is the falling of a stone to earth or the ebb and flow of the tides. It is we who have read purpose into evolution, as earlier men projected will and emotion into inorganic phenomena like storm or earthquake. If we wish to work towards a purpose for the future of man we must formulate that purpose ourselves. Purposes in life are made, they are not found."

—Dr. JULIAN HUXLEY.

This Believing World

Christians have always been at loggerheads as to what Jesus or the Gospels or Paul said or meant and they are now at it hard to settle the question whether his Virgin Mother had or had not a large family by her—more or less—aged hubby. Poor Joseph has almost always been depicted by the Church as an impotent old gent; and therefore the "brethren" of Jesus are explained to the faithful as being either his cousins, or as being the children of Joseph before he became old by another wife. The mix-up is really due to the fact that the Inspired Word is hopelessly confused—thus proving beyond doubt that God Almighty was entirely responsible for it.

But not only is the Bible Inspired by God—we have the Rev. B. Graham's own positive Word that he and his Mission have also had "the Spirit of God working in a singularly unusual way" converting 36,000 people "to make a decision for Christ." The fact that the converts were all fervent believers even without Billy is beside the point. What is remarkable (as himself says) is how well he has catered "for the spiritual hunger" so prevalent in Britain; and soon he will be back converting more genuine Christians to "make the decision for Christ." Why, it's almost a miracle in itself!

Apart from Biblical discussion as such the Church is always ready to give positive assurance that Prayers are almost always answered—except of course when money is asked for. It is simply useless to ask the Lord to give you the Derby winner or fill in a Football Pools paper. God won't even pay your rent or provide the necessary funds for a fortnight's holiday on the continent. But he will always be ready to give a Billy Graham strength to evangelise a country so long as other people pay all the expenses. And this is only just. One must never expect any Deity to be bothered with filthy lucre—such as counting the costs or paying hotel bills.

Writing in a Leicester paper the "Padre" deprecates "arguing about prayer." The proof "that God answers prayer is in the praying" as he stoutly maintains, for he himself assures us that "no prayer is ever unheeded or unanswered," and he ought to know. So there you are. If you put your money on a horse as the result of prayer and it loses, that's because you put it on the wrong horse. If you had asked God for the winner, you'd have won. It's as simple as that. Or is it?

The biggest of all fakes in Spiritualism (as we have so often said) are "spirit" photographs, and they keep popping up regularly for our consumption. The Marquis of Ely recently found some snaps taken 20 years ago packed with pictures of an Elizabethan ghost—and which naturally instantly converted his wife to believe in spooks. The photographs were shown to "experts" who are "convinced" they were not fakes; but of course we are not given the names of these experts and how they know. There never has been a genuine "spirit" photograph; but, after all, the people who can believe in the miracles of Jesus, need not shy at a photographic "miracle."

Just as the well known Spiritualist, Miss Geraldine Cummins, got into touch with the spirit of Bernard Shaw immediately after his death, so different mediums manage

to get into touch with the late Ivor Novello. He is always getting "messages" over, and now he has persuaded a Mrs. Nevitt to open a "healing" centre. In complete proof of this, Mrs. Nevitt has told us how all sorts of things happened in her home—doors opening, unaccountable noises, terrific crashes of heavy mirrors, and other remarkable happenings, and all due to poor Novello insisting on curing incurable patients. In this unhappy world he was responsible for some splendid musical plays—but perhaps a course of medicine in "Summerland" has changed him. Why do all our geniuses, as soon as they pass over, always completely forget what they were famous for here and go in for something so totally alien to their own work? In other words, why do they make such asses of themselves?

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

"Of what use are the Bishops in the House of Lords?" (Shaftesbury).

The Whitbread Poor Law Bill of 1807, which included State provision for Elementary Schools, passed the House of Commons, but was thrown out by the Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury helping the process of wrecking.

The Religious Disabilities Repeal Bill was repeatedly thrown out, an Archbishop declaring that Parliament would be degraded if it contained any non-Christians, and that the proposed measure would "shake the foundations of religion."

The Reform Bill of 1931-1932 aroused keen opposition, in which the political wisdom of the Episcopate shared. Twenty-one of its members voted against the Bill.

Against Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule for Ireland Bill in 1893 twenty-two Bishops recorded their votes.

In 1842 it was proposed in the House of Lords that an official inquiry should be made into the distressed condition of the country. Four Bishops voted against the suggestion.

The Bishops' adverse vote on the question of reform in factory legislation provoked Lord Shaftesbury in 1844 to say: "They are timid, time-serving, and great worshippers of wealth and power."

Only one Bishop spoke (in 1819) in favour of limiting the hours of child labour in cotton mills.

Only one Bishop attended (in 1819) the debate on the Bill for regulating the hours of boy chimney sweeps.

When the "Deceased Wife's Sister Bill" was debated the ecclesiastical influence was powerful enough to defeat the reform on at least five occasions. The Bill passed in 1907, after a fight which had lasted for more than fifty years; even then fourteen Bishops voted against it.

No fewer than twenty-four Bishops voted in 1858 against the proposed abolition of Compulsory Church Rates; none for it.

The Education Act of 1870 received scant support and much opposition from the Lord's Chosen.

Telegraphs as well as railroads were discovered by pulpsters to be heralds of Antichrist (a mysterious personage whose identity has always been obscure), and therefore to be opposed by the religious world.

Present day examples like opposition to birth control, Sunday freedom, etc., will readily come to mind, and though the spread of knowledge and the efforts of freethinkers have now weakened the power of the Church, nevertheless the Church must be judged by the period of its strength, and its present temper estimated in that light.

G.H.T.

NEXT WEEK

MARGARET KNIGHT'S NEW BOOK

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
Manchester Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, 3 p.m., Platt Fields: 7-30 p.m., St. Mary's Blitzed Site: Speakers, Messrs. MCCALL, MILLS, or WOODCOCK. Every weekday, Deansgate Blitzed Site, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday and Sunday at 8 p.m. Messrs. PARRY, THOMPSON, and other speakers.
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.
West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. RIDLEY, EBURY, O'NEILL and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.—Sunday, July 10, 11 a.m.: J. HURTON HYND, "Walt Whitman and 'The American Dream'." (100th Anniversary "Leaves of Grass.")

Notes and News

IT would be safe to say that the name and work of Thomas Paine—thanks to the tireless efforts of Freethinkers—have never been more appreciated than now. Apart from the way his American admirers founded a museum in his honour, we have to thank Joseph Lewis of New York for his determination to put up two statues to Paine, one in America and one in Paris; and now the eighty-year-old A. E. Packard of Glasgow, known as the "Maryhill Millionaire," has announced his own intention to put up a memorial in honour of the famous author of the *Rights of Man* and the *Age of Reason* near his mansion on the Great Western Road.

Mr. Packard thinks that the advice of Napoleon Bonaparte—"every city should erect a gold statue to Thomas Paine"—ought in some measure to be followed; and we congratulate him on his fine courage and enterprise. It takes no little courage to champion, not so much the author of the *Rights of Man*, as of the *Age of Reason* which, though written over 150 years ago, can still be read as a completely effective antidote to the excessive bibliolary of our age.

We are pleased to record a steady sale for *Morals Without Religion* by Mrs. Margaret Knight, the broadcast of which brought about such an avalanche of abuse from the more devoted followers of gentle Jesus, meek and mild. This broadcast lecture is still being discussed—for example, Prof. G. von Frankenburg has written over two pages about it and her critics in the July number of the German *Geisterfreiheit*.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £883 12s. 8d.; F. Newell, 10s.; J. F. Tuck, 13s.; P. Trower, £1; S. C. Merrifield 1s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; Anon (Old Market Sq., Nottingham), 10s.; E. J. Hughes, 5s.; Total to date, £886 18s. 8d.

Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

BRAVE PIONEER

SOMEWHERE in the churchyard of the beautiful little village of Flemingstone, in the Vale of Glamorgan, lies the remains of Iolo Morgannog; archiologist, philosopher and poet of the eighteenth century, and one of the greatest fighters for freedom of thought and human liberty that Wales has ever produced.

From his bookshop at Cowbridge he distributed thousands upon thousands of Thomas Paine's great work "The Rights Of Man," and travelled on horseback throughout the whole of the South Wales counties creating a huge demand for Paine's book.

And when the law stepped in making the sale of the book illegal, he still carried on until at last, persecuted and prosecuted, his enemies brought him to ruin and an unknown grave; giving them a temporary victory over this "infidel enemy," as they called him.

However. In the wall of the old book shop at Cowbridge his admirers have placed a plaque to the memory of this great man, and even in the little church at Flemingstone a plaque has been placed describing his genius but saying nothing of his heresy and why with their powerful weapon of persecution and social ostracism they finally exiled him from his beautiful Vale of Glamorgan, where broken in spirit and health, the cold hand of charity gave him a bed of straw.

Returning at last to his home to die, he was rewarded with an unknown grave. Such has been the tragic cold end of so many of the pioneers for freedom of thought, and as I wandered through that little churchyard I wondered where did lie the remains of that brave freethinker of long ago who produced his great verse from the lore of old Wales and carried the torch of freedom of thought throughout the land he loved..

PAUL VARNEY

CONSCIENCE

THE mistake of many writers and preachers consists in their regarding conscience as a sign-post pointing the direction of virtue or morality. It is not a sign-post, for it ratifies with its approval contrary roads to goodness.

The motor-car of humanity is travelling, with the will of man as driver, to moral perfection as a destination. Conscience does not function as a divine finger-post, pointing infallibly to that destination, but rather as petrol supplying the motive force now moving the car in the direction decided upon by experience and knowledge after consulting the finger-post of reason. The petrol may be good or bad, as the conscience is strong or weak, but without it the car will not move. The signpost of reason may have its letters blurred, or the education may be so faulty that the directions are misunderstood. All these mishaps are possible with human agencies, but not so with divine, if God is omniscient and omnipotent.

Conscience supplies, therefore, not infallible directions as to which way to go, but rather spiritual energy urging us to travel towards that goal which reason, education, memory and social approbation in times past or present have decided is worthy of our endeavours.

(George Whitehead: *What is Morality?*)

On Re-Reading Renan

By H. CUTNER

MOST Free thinkers (I hope) have read Ernest Renan's most famous work, *Life of Jesus*. A number of so-called biographies like Strauss's—which is mostly a drastic criticism of stories in the Gospels—had been written before, but Renan had a beautiful and persuasive style and a most sentimental adoration for Jesus. He was by no means blind to the faults of his hero but, after all, Jesus was only a Man, even if in his opinion it must be with a capital M.

As far as logic and reason were concerned, Renan was almost as drastic as Strauss. He knew perfectly well that the Gospels stories were mythical, that miracles do not happen and that, if there really was a God, Jesus was not his son. Renan was an Atheist himself as his Catholic opponents knew perfectly well; but he could not give up Jesus. He hated to give up anything in the Gospels though reason forced him to admit that if Jesus spoke as the Synoptics reported, he could never have spoken as John makes him.

In fact, in his later editions he practically surrendered the Gospel of John; and going back to him as I have done recently, I can see how terribly hard he must have found giving up so much which at one time he believed with such perfect faith.

One very interesting thing I have discovered. It was through the famous reprints published by the RPA in the early years of this century that I read Renan's *Life of Jesus* (later reprinted in the Thinker's Library) with the notice "complete edition" on the title page. It was only the other day that I found it was *not* a "complete edition" for most of the original notes were omitted. These notes are nearly as interesting as the text—and in some cases more so. In the text, Renan allowed his enthusiasm and adoration often to run away with him. In many of the notes, we get a sobering influence, a more radical interpretation. In such a work as this *Life of Jesus* they should never have been omitted.

Like so many people, I loathe an abridged edition of some famous book. I loathe the bowdlerised versions. I want to read what the author wrote, not what some editor thinks I should be allowed to read. I prefer not to read a book that has been abridged. How many people know that both those masterpieces, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, have been published in innumerable editions which have been presented as unabridged or "complete," but which can easily be shown to have had chunks removed? This may be necessary when preparing an edition for children but surely not when included in a series of standard authors?

Renan himself prepared a number of editions of his famous romance—as it has been called—without the notes, but he had some special purpose in view. In one of these, he admits that he would like to see belief in the supernatural "diminished" but he hoped his book would infuse a "Christian spirit" in his readers. Christianity may not be a "revelation" but it is a tradition and an excellent one at that. And Renan insisted that Christianity was necessary "to the moral and religious education of humanity." He had no belief himself, but it was a good thing for all the other people. I confess that when I read all this my estimation of the great French writer dropped considerably.

Although Renan admitted that he belonged to no democratic party, he liked the word "democracy" and he wanted his *Life of Jesus* to make Christian disciples of democrats. We are all brothers—as Jesus said—before God, and that was a great ideal for Renan. He was no enemy of religion, he maintained, and he hoped his book would prove to the "people" that Jesus was their best friend. Even if Jesus was only an ideal figure, a legendary person—still his life

was the source and inspiration of an "eternal consolation." And so on. It certainly was not Renan the thinker who filled pages of a "new" introduction with this kind of nonsense.

In his first edition, he gave chapter and verse for all statements that required them, and some of his comments are astonishingly frank. As one example, he tells us that Jesus was born at Nazareth, "a small town of Galilee, which before his time had no celebrity." The note accompanying this statement, which is omitted in the "complete" edition published in the RPA reprints, and in the Thinker's Library, says Nazareth "is neither named in the writings of the Old Testament, nor in Josephus, nor in the Talmud." This is a deadly admission; and it would astonish readers who have not read them how many books and articles have been written on this very point. How could Jesus be called "of Nazareth" when, as far as it is possible to find out, there was no Nazareth? Renan is quite certain that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem, and has a long note about it which even our expurgators did not dare to omit.

The point I wish to make is that Renan's admission that neither in the O.T. nor in Josephus nor in the Talmud is Nazareth mentioned is very damaging to the belief that Jesus was a real personage. Not only is he called "Jesus of Nazareth" in the Gospels, but all reverent Rationalists call him thus every time he is referred to by them. And if Jesus was not born in Bethlehem—and Nazareth was non-existent at the time—where exactly are we?

In the Encyclopaedia Biblica, Canon Cheyne has a long article about it, and concludes that there never was such a town at the time; but Christians—and reverent Rationalists—hate to be told that. They feel even if it is a legend, it is a very fine one, for it helps to give all Christians a pious uplift so necessary, if not for their salvation at least for their social behaviour. But I am not really complaining about this as much as about buying a book which I am told is a "complete edition" when it is nothing of the kind. In fact, the original edition of the *Life of Jesus* is packed with very sceptical notes which must have made all Catholics shudder (as they did)—and for that reason and perhaps for other reasons, most of them, if not all, were discreetly omitted in some of the later editions by Renan himself.

In the Preface to the RPA reprint, Mr. C. T. Gorham tells us that it is a reprint "of the first English edition published by Messrs. Trubner in 1863." Well, Trubner's edition is before me now, and it is packed with very valuable notes, nearly all omitted by Mr. Gorham. I have given one only as an example; space forbids more. Perhaps this little protest will not fall on entirely stony ground.

SCIENCE FRONT—10

Vestiges

By JOHN BOWDEN

1. From the top of the forearm down to the palm is, in most people, a tendinous cord (palmaris longus). In primate monkeys, which use the hand to walk upon as well as for grasping this structure is fully developed. "The foot-like action disappears from the hand with the assumption of the upright posture, and hence in anthropoid apes and in man the palmaris longus loses its function and becomes very small and may be absent altogether."—(Keith.) Ten per cent of persons are without this cord.
2. A counterpart of the palmaris longus is found in the leg. It is called the plantaris longus. "It is often little more than a white tendinous cord, having no muscular

belly; in five per cent of men it is altogether absent."

3. Of a vestige called the levator claviculae (lifter of the clavicle) we are told: "It is invariably present in pronograde monkeys, in which it advances the shoulder in running; it becomes modified in its size and attachments in the orthograde apes; in man it has almost disappeared."

4. At the base of the rear wall of the armpit, in one per cent of persons, there can be found a fibrous remnant of a formerly fully-developed and fully-functioning muscle, the latissimo condyloideus. "In apes . . . this muscle is a source of strength in climbing," as also are two extra projections, or heads, of the biceps, which occasionally are found as vestiges in man. One of these, the inner, "may be seen in ten per cent of bodies."

5. Sixty per cent of men are without the psoas minor. When it is present, it is small and mainly composed of tendinous or fibrous tissue. It extends from the backbone to the brim of the pelvis. "In anthropoid apes it is not much better developed than in man, but in pronograde apes it is robust and strong."

6. One person in 60 has a remnant of the acromiobasilar muscle. This muscle is found in the hind legs of all pronograde mammals, and is associated with the quadrupedal gait.

7. The sternalis muscle of the breast has outlived its usefulness in man. It is found in one in every 25 persons, and then only as a vestige.

8. The flat rectus muscles which extend upwards from the pubes are shrinking. In pronograde animals they serve to support the abdomen. They have not nearly the same importance in man. Sometimes they extend to the second ribs, as in monkeys; but generally they end at the fifth ribs, sometimes at the sixth; and occasionally they extend only as far as the seventh. Other structures which tell the same story of human descent are:

9. The azygous lobe of the lung, which projects from

the lower part of the right lung, almost all human beings possess as a vestige. In pronograde monkeys this lobe is well-developed and occupies a space between the heart and the diaphragm. In a small percentage of men it is developed as in monkeys, and when this occurs the lobe always pushes its way between the heart and diaphragm. "We cannot explain the presence of an azygous lobe unless we suppose that man has passed through a pronograde stage."

10. At the lower end of the humerus, near the elbow, there is occasionally to be found a hook-like process called the supracondyloid process. In the lowest mammals and in reptiles there is at this place a circlet of bone, or foramen, through which the great nerve of the arm passes. Sometimes, though very rarely, the supracondyloid in man makes a complete circle. When it does the nerve leading to the forearm invariably passes through it. Another foramen occasionally present in man which, says Keith, may be called the inter-condyloid, occurs in various anthropoid apes and likewise in many lower animals. "It is remarkable," said Darwin, "that this perforation seems to have been present in man more frequently in ancient times than recently."

11. There is another hook-like process at the top of the human shoulder-blade. It is known as the coracoid (crow's beak) process. In the platypus and in reptiles (and birds) this bone stretches from the shoulder-blade to the middle of the shoulder-girdle, where it is joined by a bone called the episternum. The episternal bones also are vestiges.

12. A vestige of the notochord may persist (and lead to tumours in adult life). A vestigial bone called the os centrale is sometimes found in the human wrist (always in the embryo).

13. As a vestige in new-born babies is a small pore in the median wall of the nasal chamber, the remnant of an accessory organ of smell.

Does Beauty Prove God Exists?

By ERNEST BUSENBARK

A THEIST has said that if one wants to know whether God exists, one needs merely to observe the marvels of nature, the idea being, of course, that the beauty of flowers, trees, lakes, waterfalls, streams, clouds, sunrise, sunset, and other phenomena proves that the universe is the handiwork of an infinitely wise creator. All this beauty, it is assumed, was planned by God for man's enjoyment.

This argument follows a practice, by no means uncommon, of taking certain facts which are favourable to one's belief and, by minimizing or ignoring contrary evidence, concluding that the accepted facts prove this or that.

Beautiful things do not prove the existence of God any more than ugly things prove his non-existence. Beauty is not a concrete thing like a house or a tree; it is a combination of qualities or properties pleasing to the eye or ear and is the result of a state of mind, which, like esthetic and moral concepts, varies from place to place and from time to time. The term is often wrongly applied to things which are merely very strange or are extremely large or minute. Sometimes, too, the term is used to describe a machine or mechanical apparatus when that which really draws admiration is not the shape or appearance of the object but its apparent efficiency, the ingenuity and perfection revealed in its design, and the careful, painstaking precision with which the various parts are fitted together.

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the unstable character of beauty than is to be found in what is called

"style" or "fashion," particularly as it concerns women's apparel. Although fashions in articles of dress may contain elements of beauty and good taste, they are essentially products of complex psychological phenomena and are not necessarily either beautiful or comfortable. If an article of dress happens to receive public approbation, women will proudly parade about in it during its brief period of popularity even though it may be of the most atrocious appearance. The ridicule which is heaped upon things which are new or strange is often succeeded by toleration, then affection.

In art, the fleeting character of concepts of beauty may be seen in the growing popularity of the various schools of modernism in comparison with the more conservative masterpieces of the Renaissance. In music, a similar change may be seen in the growing preference for modern compositions over the older classical works.

On the other hand, the music, painting, architecture, sculpture, and other arts of the West appear just as hideous and barbaric, and lacking in beauty to the peoples of India, China, and other Oriental countries as their arts appear to people of the West.

Human beauty, viz., the kind that men and women see in each other, is associated with sexual selection and, like other forms of beauty, varies throughout the world. As is well known, the standards by which Oriental people judge physical beauty are quite different from those of the West.

Saucer shaped lips are considered very desirable by belles of Uganda, in Africa, but, to people of other countries, such deformations of the mouth are repulsive.

Both male and female members of many savage or semi-civilized tribes pull hair out of their head or beard; knock out their upper front teeth, or file them short or to a point; pierce their nose, lips, and ears and force wooden pegs into the openings; paint, tat-too, or prick the skin or make a series of cuts in it, then put foreign material in the incisions in order to create a scarified pattern over the face or body.

The sight of clouds bellowing upward in a column to a height of several miles after an atomic explosion is one of the most awesome and majestic spectacles the human eye has ever witnessed, but the power of such explosions to destroy life and property is so frightful that it would seem inappropriate to speak of such an event as being beautiful.

Lightning, cyclones, and swirling masses of great black storm clouds contain as many elements of beauty as do the fleecy white clouds to be seen on a bright summer day but the former are never described as beautiful because they are associated with great violence and destruction. The streamlined bodies, harmonious colouring, and graceful movements of many species of serpents are characteristics usually associated with beauty, but, because of the harmful character of serpents, they are not usually considered beautiful.

Generally, the things which appear beautiful to us are those to which we have become accustomed, especially if they are useful or are associated in our minds with pleasant experiences. Because of man's natural conservatism, there is a tendency to cling to the tried and trusted things whose qualities are well known and a reluctance to adopt new things or ideas.

Natives of blazing hot deserts, steaming jungles, lofty mountain hamlets, and the cold, icy Arctic regions, see beauty in the parts of the world to which they are accustomed, a beauty which usually is not appreciated by natives of other regions. Man's ability to see beauty in the world about him is an expression of the inborn adaptability which enables him to exist in every part of the world.

All the beauty in the universe exists only as an aesthetic concept in the human mind and has no place in a discussion regarding the existence of God. Natural objects acquire or lose beauty as the human concept changes. Things which become old-fashioned and no longer appeal to the eye do not change: it is the mind of the beholder that changes.

(From *The Truth Seeker*, New York.)

REVIEW

"*Uneasy Lies the Head*," by JOHN O'HARE; Alvin Redman Ltd., 12s. 6d.

In this age of insipid constitutional monarchy, when George the Good is succeeded by George the Better, and we presume, Elizabeth can hardly be termed less than The Best, it is a sheer joy to escape to reality with John O'Hare's *Book of Kings and Queens*. "*Uneasy Lies the Head*" is proof, as O'Hare says of Jorgen Jorgensen, King of Iceland, slave of the Dice, "that compared with fact, fiction is but the laborious narration of commonplace events." Readers of the *Freethinker* will know O'Hare from his poems and limpid prose that appear too seldom in that periodical. He has dedicated his book to his friend, our President, F.A. Ridley, and, forgive my little boast, he is a member of the North London branch.

Ask for it at your library, and rummage with O'Hare through "the strange tales that reside in the footnotes of history." "Rum, rape and Roguery," crowns, intrigue and transient glory, through Lebanon, China, Africa, Russia, Bavaria, Corsica, and the fantastic communist republic of Libertatia our cinerama takes us to see the strange uneasy heads. If you, as Chapman Cohen did, like tales of adventure for mind's ease, you will get it here, richly embellished with the Irish wit and Freethought philosophy of the Author.

Eva Ebury.

Correspondence

FUNDAMENTAL FAITH

In my view Mr. H. Cutner is quite wrong in asserting, as he does in his article "Combating Christianity," that "Freethought recognises no Gods . . ."

I believe that it is this attitude of mind which is responsible to a very great extent for the weakness of the Freethought movement in the world. Men like Mr. Cutner assume that Freethinking is the sole prerogative of atheists whereas a more agnostic (and rational) view of the situation would accept the fact that there is room for argument about the ultimate nature of the universe and the purpose of mankind in the universe.

I believe very firmly that the best service Freethinkers can render human society is to provide a common platform for all bases for rational living. In the realm of faith—which is fundamental to all rational action—we are perforce concerned with unprovable assumptions or premises. Now this means that atheists as well as theists are in the position of having to guess where they cannot know.

Surely if Freethinkers adopt this attitude of mind and consciously guide their propaganda in accordance with these principles, not only shall we be nearer the truth about our lives but will also be seen to be the very foundation of a new era in human social thinking which can bring all the stupid local nationalists and the million warring sects of religious and philosophic and racial theorists under a common banner.—Yours sincerely,

E. G. MACFARLANE.

[Mr. Cutner writes: "Let me assure Mr. Macfarlane that I am quite certain there is room for argument about the Universe—even in the Church of Rome. But why should I not argue from the point of view of a convinced atheist?"]

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